

FORESTRY DIVISION



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FORESTRY DIVISION

Protecting Montana's natural resources from wildland fires through regulation and partnerships with federal, state, and local agencies, and helping Montanans achieve forest-land stewardship and compliance with state forestry laws.

The Forestry Division, headquartered in Missoula, is responsible for planning and implementing forestry programs through a network of field offices located across the state. The forestry program has two major functions: fire and aviation management, and service forestry. Each function is further broken down into programs and subprograms, most with statewide application. The Forestry Division has the following goals.

- Protecting the state's natural resources from wildfire, insect pests, and disease
- Sustaining or improving the natural resources of private forestland for the good of all Montanans
- Promoting and supporting conservation practices on all lands in Montana
- Enforcing the state's forest practices laws in a manner that is both fair and consistent to all parties, and that meets the intent of the legislation
- Encouraging the maintenance, planting, and management of trees and shrubs in Montana communities

Fire and Aviation Management

As charged by state law, DNRC protects the natural resources of the state from fire and is responsible for ensuring fire protection on all forestlands within this state that are officially classified by the department as forestlands.

Protection

DNRC's Fire and Aviation Management Program is a team of trained professionals providing wildland fire service leadership to Montana, commissioned by Montana citizens to protect the natural resources of the state by preventing and suppressing wildland fires, and accountable to Montana citizens. Presently, all wildlands in Montana have some form of fire protection. DNRC protects natural resources on state and private lands through aggressive fire prevention and protection activities. A total of 50,497,550 acres of state-owned and private lands are protected as detailed in state resource management plans, or as required by law (see Table 12). The Fire and Aviation Program staffs 65 engine (and water tender) companies and 6 helicopters to provide direct protection of 5.2 million acres. The program also loans over 350 engines and water tenders to local fire agencies, primarily in the eastern part of the state. DNRC has been given the responsibility to coordinate all contract responses of fire department resources that cross county lines.

Direct Protection

DNRC provides direct protection to a total of 5,152,315 acres consisting of 3,481,884 acres of state and private land; 694,665 acres of U. S. Bureau of Land

Management (BLM) lands; 4,551 acres of Tribal/U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) lands; 18,117 acres of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) lands; 2,776 acres of U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) lands; and 950,322 acres of U. S. Forest Service (USFS) lands. Privately owned forested lands within the boundaries of an incorporated city are included. Priority is given to the protection of forested lands owned by the state.

State/County Cooperative Fire Protection

Under the State/County Cooperative Fire Protection Program, the department has secondary protection responsibility for 45,309,480 acres of state-owned and privately owned non-forested lands. These lands are predominantly found in eastern Montana. A network of 400 fire departments provides initial response to wild-fires in the 56 counties. DNRC assists on fires that escape the counties' capabilities and provides them with training, prevention materials, and equipment.

Contracted Federal Protection

Fire protection of a total of 1,706,186 acres of state and private lands is subcontracted to federal agencies.

Table 12
Fire Protection by DNRC in FY 2004

Total Acres	Category	State and Private Lands (Acres)	Public Lands (Acres)
5,152,315	DNRC Direct Protection State and Private Lands BLM Lands USFS Lands Tribal/BIA Lands BOR Lands FWS Lands	3,481,884	694,665 950,322 4,551 2,776 18,117
45,309,480	State/County Cooperative Fire Protection ¹	45,309,480	
1,706,186	Federal Direct Protection ² Protected by BIA (Tribal) Protected by BLM Protected by USFS Protected by FWS	145,817 68,823 1,454,676 36,870	
52,167,981	TOTALS	50,497,550	1,670,431

1. Includes all 56 counties in Montana

2. Subcontracted to federal agencies

Fire Prevention

The Fire Prevention Program's purpose is to reduce the number and severity of wildfires occurring each year. The program is made up of three parts.

- Engineering through prescribed fire (and airshed management), fuel treatment programs, and application of DNRC's wildland/residential development guidelines
- Education through homeowner programs (like Firewise Communities), workshops, and production of printed and electronic material
- Enforcement through Forest Fire Regulations, fire cause investigation, and forest restrictions when applicable

Fuel reduction in wildland/residential interface areas continues to be emphasized through National Fire Plan funding. Ongoing projects include fuel treatment, home fire safety evaluations, community education and awareness, and prioritizing communities at risk.

DNRC has completed its fire risk rating on 95 percent of the direct protection areas that are determined to be high risk. Several hundred plats of proposed developments are evaluated annually, and recommendations are then submitted to county commissioners based on DNRC's Fire Protection Guidelines. The Fire Protection Guidelines for Wildland/Residential Interface Development continue to be applied to existing and proposed developments throughout the state.

Major issues in FY 2004 include implementation and monitoring of programs funded by the National Fire Plan, implementation of a revised forest restriction process, and promotion of ongoing educational programs.

Fire Suppression

Through the Fire Suppression Program, DNRC directly protects 5,152,315 acres of state, private, and federal lands; assists all 56 cooperating counties with fires exceeding their capabilities on 45,309,480 acres of state and private lands; and subcontracts fire protection on 1,706,186 acres of state and private lands to the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (Tribal). DNRC also provides support and assistance to federal fire agencies and other states when appropriate.

The number of fires that occurred during the 2003 fire season was above the five-year average; 567 fire incidents that burned a total of 175,706 acres were reported (see Figures 9 and 10). The average number of fires over the last five years is 446 per year, and the average number of acres burned over each of the last five years is 95,159. The annual acreage burned varied from 16,758 acres in 2001 to 175,706 acres in 2003.

Figure 9
Number of Fires on State-Protected Land

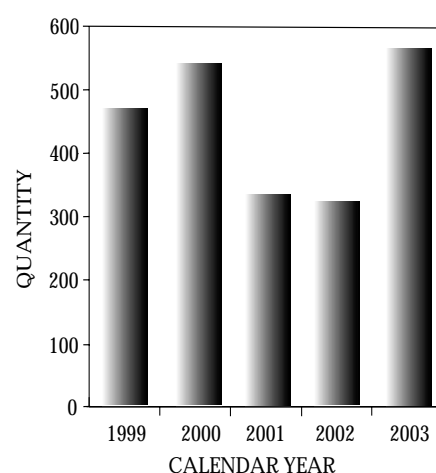


Figure 10
Acres Burned on State-Protected Land

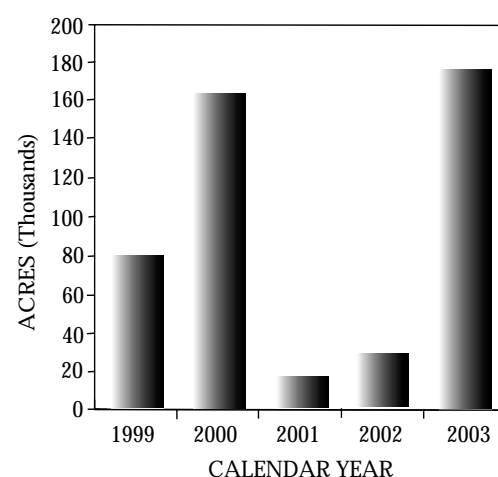
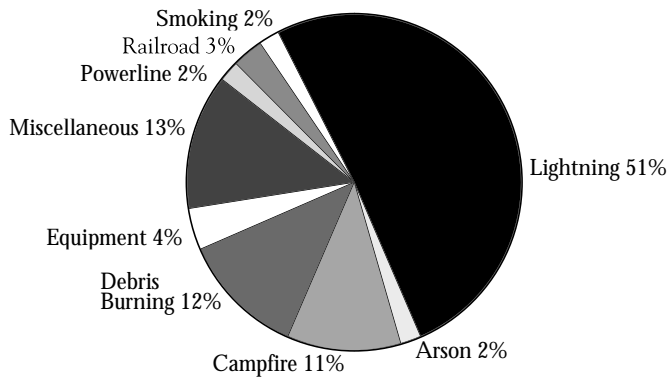


Figure 11
Percentage of Fires, by Cause
(5-Year Average)



Lightning is the single most frequent cause, starting 51 percent of the fires (see Figure 11). DNRC contained an average of 96 percent of the direct protection fires at under 10 acres in size in 2003. The charts are based on direct protection and county assist fires.

Fire Training

The Fire and Aviation Management Bureau provides training in fire prevention, detection, investigation, suppression, aviation, communications, safety, prescribed fire, participation on incident management teams, and wildland fire training instruction.

DNRC participates in several levels of fire training. Sixty employees attended upper level fire management/suppression courses put on by the Northern Rockies Training Center for DNRC and local government. In the Northern Rockies Coordinating Group Zones, DNRC coordinated, instructed, and participated in 117 courses for about 2,925 agency and local government participants in FY 2004. Through the State/County Cooperative Fire Protection Program, DNRC also sponsored 83 Suppression Skill, Incident Command System, and Standards for Survival courses for 1,372 people and 42 Basic and Intermediate Wildland Firefighting courses for 801 volunteer and career firefighters in 56 counties.

To defray the costs of training local government forces, the Montana Firewarden Association received a Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) grant that DNRC helps administer. DNRC also received a grant from the Department of Homeland Security through the Disaster and Emergency Services Division to provide training in Incident Command Systems and Hazardous Material/Weapons of Mass Destruction to any DNRC employee who works in the field and could come across something of a suspicious nature.

To meet the needs for firefighters in the 2003 fire season, DNRC trained National Guard aviation and support personnel.

DNRC maintains the qualifications of and certifies several hundred DNRC and local government firefighters utilizing the Incident Qualification System. DNRC is on the development team for the Incident Qualification System, which is funded by the National Association of State Foresters. This system is used by the vast majority of states to track qualifications and certifications.

DNRC is actively involved (in cooperation with other wildland fire agencies) in the development of overhead and management personnel within the agency and in local government, providing training opportunities at the Northern Rockies Interagency Training Center, National Fire Academy, and National Advanced Fire and Resource Institute.

Development and Support

Through its Equipment Development Program, DNRC obtains federal excess property and develops it into fire suppression equipment and vehicles. This equipment

is used primarily to support the State/County Cooperative Fire Protection Program. In FY 2004, DNRC obtained supplies, vehicles, and aircraft that have a total value of \$2,103,969 through the Federal Excess Property Program. The equipment acquired included a total of 33 vehicles and aircraft.

The 97 individual development projects that were completed in FY 2004 are listed in Table 13.

Aviation

The Aviation Section operates and maintains a fleet of nine aircraft. The fleet consists of six helicopters and three fixed-wing airplanes. The three fixed-wing aircraft, Cessna 180 series that are used primarily for fire patrol and personnel transportation, are located in Helena, Missoula, and Kalispell. The section operates four Bell UH-1 series type 2 helicopters at Helena, Missoula, and Kalispell in support of DNRC's initial attack fire suppression program. Two light, type 3 helicopters (Bell 206 B-III) are stationed in Helena. One is owned by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). DNRC maintains this aircraft and provides pilot services to DEQ. In return, DNRC reserves the right to use this aircraft for fire missions. The second light helicopter is used as a backup aircraft or for additional coverage.

In FY 2004, the aircraft flew a total of 1,574 hours. Other program statistics are shown in Table 14 below.

Table 13
Development Projects in FY 2004

Develop Type 6 (400-gallon) wildland engines	2
Develop Type 6 (300-gallon) wildland engines	5
Develop Type 6 (200-gallon) wildland engines	7
Develop Type 5 (500-gallon) engines	2
Develop Type 4 (800-gallon) engines	2
Develop (1,000-gallon) water tender	1
Construct flatbeds	19
Rebuild pump panels	29
Rebuild pump heads	30

Table 14
Aviation Program Accomplishments in FY 2004

Water/retardant dropped	959,636 gallons
Fire administration	42 hours
Fire detection/reconnaissance	769 hours
Fire — other	10 hours
Fire suppression — initial attack and extended attack	569 hours
Fire suppression — project ¹	1 hour
Fire training	50 hours
Non-fire missions	127 hours
False alarm	6 hours
TOTAL	1,574 hours

1. Project fires are large fires with organized fire management teams.

National Fire Plan

After the 2000 wildfire season, Congress authorized funding within the U.S. Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to implement the National Fire Plan (NFP). The National Fire Plan is a long-term strategy for reducing the effects of catastrophic wildfires throughout the nation. There are five key points to the National Fire Plan.

- Increase in fire suppression capabilities (firefighting)
- Rehabilitation of burned areas and restoration of landscapes
- Reduction of hazardous fuels
- Assistance to communities
- Accountability to the public and to Congress

The Western Governors' Association has developed a *10-Year Comprehensive Strategy* and an implementation plan entitled *A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment*. These documents provide direction at the national, regional, state, and local levels on National Fire Plan issues.

NFP funding to the states occurs under the community assistance point and is made available through the USFS state and private forestry programs. DNRC has responsibility for delivery of these programs on state-owned and private lands in Montana.

The DNRC NFP Program is implemented primarily within the Forestry Division's Fire and Aviation Management Bureau and Service Forestry Bureau. The National Fire Plan is delivered, wherever appropriate, through existing state and private forestry programs. These programs are:

- County Cooperative Fire Program (Fire and Aviation Management Bureau)
- State Fire Assistance Program (Fire and Aviation Management Bureau)
- Private Forestry Assistance Program (Service Forestry Bureau)
- Stewardship Program (Service Forestry Bureau)

The NFP accomplishments for these programs are included in this section. For more information about those programs, or to learn about accomplishments separate from the National Fire Plan, refer to the sections of this report called Fire and Aviation Management and Service Forestry Programs.

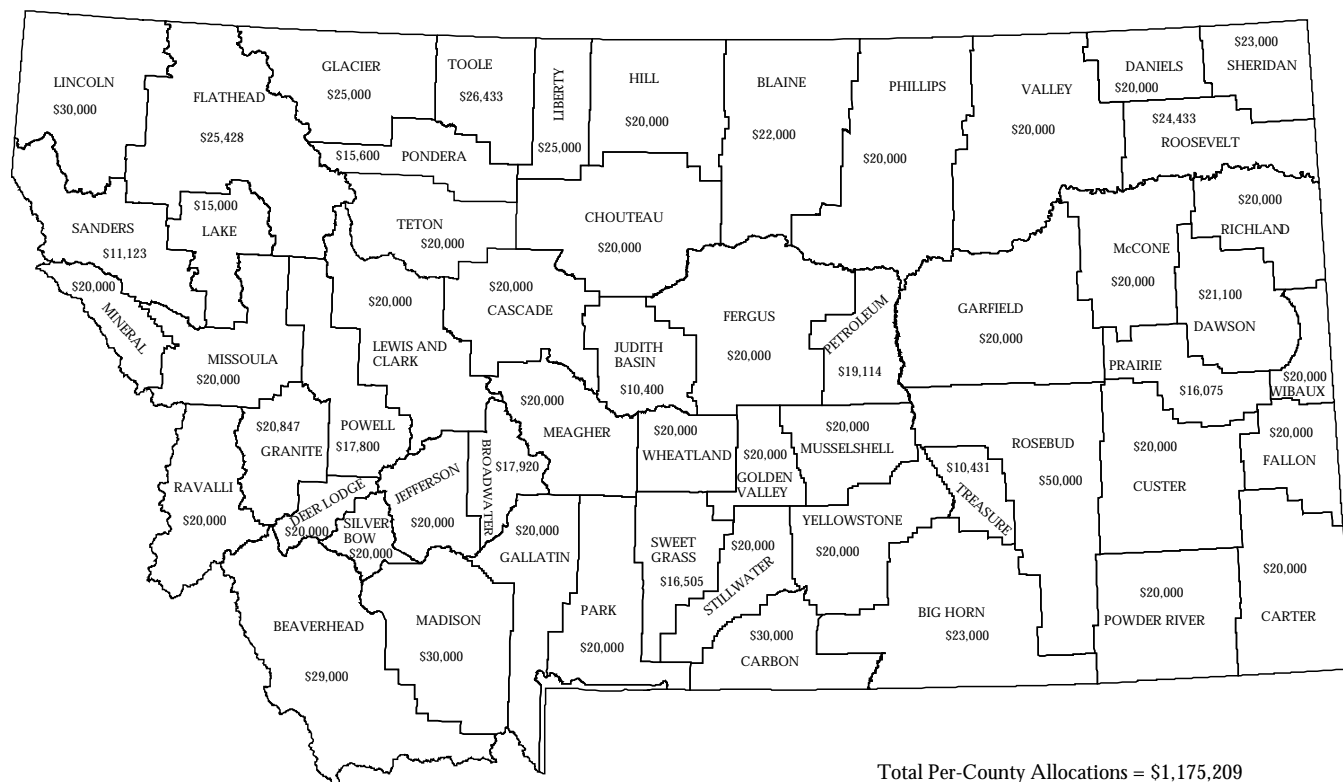
Volunteer and Rural Fire Assistance

The Volunteer and Rural Fire Assistance (VFA/RFA) Program provides assistance to county fire agencies for equipment, training, and fire prevention materials. Funding for the program comes from USFS and from the following U.S. Department of the Interior agencies: FWS, BLM, BIA, and the National Park Service.

Local fire organizations apply for funding by submitting requests to their respective county leaders, who prioritize proposals and submit a packet of requests to DNRC. Projects are funded based on recommendations from an interagency selection committee with members from the funding agencies. The Fire and Aviation Management Bureau is responsible for administration of agreements for all approved projects in the state.

Figure 12 shows the VFA/RFA funding distribution by county.

Figure 12
Montana VFA/RFA Allocations per County
for Fiscal Year 2004



State Fire Assistance

Administered through the State Fire Assistance Program, NFP-funded projects are under way in these Montana communities.

Bigfork	Frenchtown	Libby	Seeley Lake
Butte	Greenough/Potomac	Lincoln	Swan Lake
Choteau	Helena	Missoula	Virginia City
Columbia Falls	Hungry Horse	Philipsburg	West Glacier
Florence	Kalispell	Polson	Whitefish

Through a new statewide partnership with RC&Ds in Montana, the National Fire Plan hazard mitigation program will be delivered at the local level by the RC&D, with large block grant funding from DNRC. In October 2003, Montana submitted requests totaling more than \$3.5 million to the Western State Fire Managers Wildland Urban Interface Grant Program. Six of the Montana proposals totaling approximately \$2.9 million were funded during the competitive process. They are for Bitter Root RC&D, Headwaters RC&D, Northwest Regional RC&D, Tri-County Fire Working Group, Frenchtown Rural Fire District, and Bigfork Volunteer Fire Department. Work on these projects will commence in Fiscal Years 2005-2007.

All of these projects address one or more of the following areas.

Hazardous Fuel Reduction

Fuel reduction projects and vegetation treatments have been identified as a means of mitigating wildfire hazards. Projects of this type include fuel breaks, thinning, pruning, landscape modifications, etc.

Information and Education in the Wildland/Urban Interface

Homeowners and local government bear much of the responsibility for improving the defensibility of homes in the interface, but may lack knowledge and information regarding what needs to be done and how to do it. Firewise™, a national fire prevention program, is a cornerstone of fire education programs.

Homeowner and Community Action

Creating conditions in and around individual structures that will limit the transmission of fire from wildland to structures is basic to reducing the fire hazard in the interface. This is a responsibility of homeowners and communities.

Throughout Montana, hundreds of homeowners have participated in a fuels reduction cost-share program and other projects to create defensible space around homes in the wildland urban interface.

Restoration of Fire-Adapted Ecosystems

Funds are available for projects that restore the presence of fire in natural ecosystems where fire was historically present. Use of prescribed fire is approved in combination with other vegetation treatments.

The Montana Community Fire Mitigation Committee

The Montana Community Fire Mitigation Committee is an interagency group with representatives from federal, state, tribal, local, and private organizations whose mission is to protect communities and other private property within the wildland urban interface. Key accomplishments of the group include:

- Creation of a Montana National Fire Plan website
- Integration of fire planning efforts in Montana
- Completion of a statewide fire risk assessment
- Development of the Montana Communities at Risk list
- Prioritization of Montana's Western State Fire Managers Wildland Urban Interface Grant Program applications.

Special Projects

DNRC worked with the Seeley Lake Rural Fire District to produce an educational video for homeowners, *Reduce Wildfire Risk on Your Property*. The short video is designed to encourage out-of-area property owners to take action to reduce fuels around homes and on vacant lots in the Seeley Lake community.

Service Forestry Programs

The mission of DNRC's Service Forestry Bureau is to promote forest stewardship both in communities and in forestlands. The primary methods include information and education, technical assistance, financial assistance, partnerships, and forest practices regulation. A primary partner is the U.S. Forest Service's State and Private Forestry Department, which provides funding for a variety of assistance programs.

Service forestry programs provide products and services to various client groups and individuals. The State Conservation Seedling Nursery grows seedlings for private conservation plantings and reforestation of state-owned lands. Education emphasizing the stewardship and care of forestlands is presented to private forest owners and resource professionals. Communities are assisted with the care and planting of their community forests. Montana's forest laws are upheld. Private forestland improvements are administered using federal cost-share funds. Forest health problems are identified and monitored statewide.

State Conservation Seedling Nursery

DNRC's nursery produces and distributes seedlings for conservation plantings such as fire and logging reforestation, farmstead windbreaks, shelterbelts, wildlife habitat, stream stabilization, and other conservation uses. The nursery provides seedlings to private landowners in Montana, the DNRC Trust Land Management Division, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), tribal agencies, the Forest Lands Enhancement Program (FLEP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), Pheasants Forever, and numerous other conservation programs and organizations.

In FY 2004 the nursery sold 973,725 conservation seedlings and produced 99,055 seedlings for reforestation of school trust lands (see Table 15). Total seedling distribution increased by over 19 percent this fiscal year. A large portion of the increase in seedling sales was for fire reforestation plantings. FLEP provided cost-share assistance to landowners interested in reforestation, and the nursery was prepared to provide locally adapted seedlings for areas impacted by fire.

Table 15
Nursery Seedling Sales from FY 2001 to FY 2005

Fiscal Year	Conservation Seedling Program				Trust Land Seedling Program			Total Nursery Production
	Seedling Production	Seedlings Delivered	Nursery Revenue	Nursery Expenditures	Seedlings Requested	Seedlings Delivered	Seedling Expenditures	
2001	927,677	881,877	\$346,884	\$339,072	201,334	173,341	\$44,767	1,101,018
2002	961,972	902,672	\$368,912	\$363,263	126,300	98,623	\$43,189	1,060,595
2003	892,500	834,225	\$327,836	\$321,031	81,050	65,260	\$39,467	957,760
2004	1,051,116	973,725	\$370,995	\$370,016	140,125	99,055	\$34,558	1,150,171
2005 est.	1,072,725	960,350	\$385,825	\$373,000	58,320			1,131,045

The nursery is a special revenue program funded solely by revenues generated from the sale of seedlings. Operating costs within the program are held to a minimum to ensure that an affordable supply of high quality, locally adapted seedlings is available to Montana landowners. The revenue received from conservation seedling sales increased by 13 percent in FY 2004 to \$370,995. All nursery program expenditures were recovered from this year's seedling sales.

DNRC nursery seedlings were planted in every county in the state, with the greatest number going to Big Horn, Cascade, Missoula, Ravalli, Lewis and Clark, and Flathead Counties. One thousand, one hundred and thirty-three landowners planted state-grown seedlings in FY 2004. The numbers of seedlings used in various conservation practices are itemized in Table 16.

Table 16 Conservation Seedling Use in FY 2004		
Conservation Practice	Number of Seedlings	Number of Landowners
Reforestation	540,553	86
Wildlife habitat	105,435	160
Farmstead windbreaks	189,306	602
Field shelterbelts	50,036	110
Stream stabilization	49,933	40
Living snow fences	5,912	26
Erosion control	3,351	3
All other uses	29,195	106
TOTALS	973,721	1,133

Establishment and maintenance of seed orchards at the nursery ensures the long-term availability of Montana-adapted plant materials to landowners. The nursery maintains 40 seed orchards of selected plant materials adapted to the numerous environments present in Montana. In FY 2004, the nursery focused on improving the health of existing orchards and replacing aging parent plants. The nursery collected, processed, or purchased 488 pounds of seed from seed orchards, private vendors, or field collections in the state.

Forest Pest Management

This program provides ground and aerial pest surveys, training, and technical services to help recognize and manage damaging insects and diseases in Montana's forests. These activities are done in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service's Northern Region Forest Health Protection Group.

In 2003, insect and disease aerial surveyors mapped 815,179 acres of State-owned lands and 6,272,143 acres of private lands in the Stillwater, Thompson, Swan, and Blackfoot River drainages and in the Garnet Mountains. Data from these surveys, combined with ground surveys and trapping programs, indicate a continuing downward trend in the health of Montana's forests. Infested acres, mortality, and growth losses from bark beetles, defoliators, root diseases, and dwarf mistletoes increased over levels in 2002. Montana has yet to recover from the droughty conditions of the past several years. Without a significant multi-year change in the weather, it is anticipated that the decline will continue.

Some of the FY 2004 program accomplishments are listed in Table 17.

Table 17
Forest Pest Management Activities in FY 2004

Technical assistance to private and industrial land managers	36 assists
Professionals, loggers, and landowners trained in pest identification and management	47
Pest samples identified and management treatments recommended	16
Aerial survey completed and sketch maps distributed to unit offices	3 million acres
DNRC timber sale analyses written	2

The program, along with USFS, also completed and distributed the annual *Montana Insect and Disease Conditions* report.

The fourth year of work was completed under a mutual contract developed by Montana and Idaho for forest pathology services and funded by a USFS grant.

Forestry Assistance

The Forestry Assistance Program provides a range of services to private forest landowners and economic development organizations. By conveying forestry knowledge, DNRC helps Montanans practice healthy environmental and economic forestland stewardship.

In FY 2004, DNRC provided 775 forestry assists, including 33 timber sale assists and 38 informational and educational assists. Sixteen insect and disease prevention and suppression assists helped Montana landowners treat 2,196 acres. Production of 961,000 board feet resulted from 9 assists on 290 acres of non-industrial forestlands.

Service foresters provided 335 person days of education in a variety of projects including Streamside Management/Best Management Practices (BMP) workshops, the 2004 Forestry Expo, county fair exhibits, school outreach, tree planting, watershed education workshops, and more. Service foresters also strengthened partnerships between DNRC and other agencies, groups, and individuals, resulting in greater collaboration and project effectiveness.

In FY 2004, the Forestry Assistance Program also administered federal programs throughout Montana. With FLEP, service foresters worked with more than 40 landowners to implement a variety of cost-share, education, and technical assistance programs covering over 100,000 acres of private forestlands. With the Conservation Education Program, service foresters helped establish a community greenhouse, produce educational natural resource trunks, and sponsor the 2004 Montana Natural Resource Youth Camp.

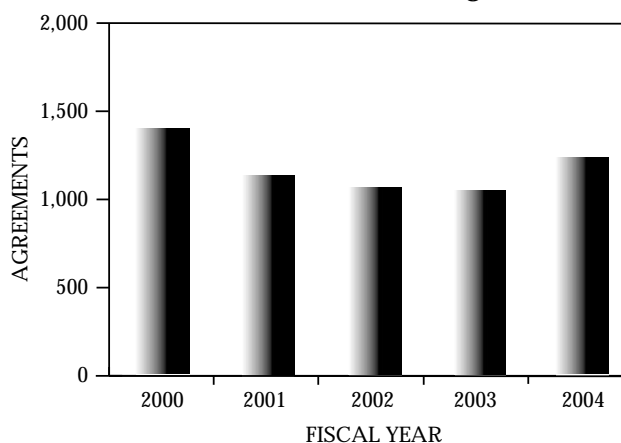
Fire Hazard Reduction

The Fire Hazard Reduction Program implements state laws pertaining to control of timber slash and debris on private land to minimize wildfire hazards. The department carries out its responsibilities by entering into a bonded contract, called a Hazard Reduction Agreement (HRA), with the private party in charge of each

cutting. The program handled 1,223 new HRAs in FY 2004 (see Figure 13), while another 1,129 HRAs were certified and closed.

In FY 2004, the Fire Hazard Reduction Program collected \$91,931 in administrative fees. In addition, a total of \$53,159 was collected and distributed to Montana State University's Extension Forestry Program.

Figure 13
New Hazard Reduction Agreements



Forest Practices

The Forest Practices Program provides information and education about forestry BMPs to individuals, groups, corporations, and other agencies. The program includes standards for all forest practices conducted in streamside management zones (SMZs). The program helps people comply with voluntary and mandatory measures designed to protect soil and water resources during timber harvesting operations. In FY 2004, the services listed in Table 18 were provided.

Table 18
Forest Practices Activities in FY 2004

BMP pre-harvest informational packages mailed to landowners	1,223
On-site consultations	237
Post-harvest evaluations	6
Alternative practices issued	24
SMZ warnings issued	11

In cooperation with the Montana Logging Association, DNRC conducted SMZ/BMP workshops in seven Montana communities for 138 loggers and landowners.

Urban and Community Forestry

The mission of the Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program is to have a sustainable community forestry program in every community in Montana. This program becomes increasingly significant as more Montanans come to appreciate and understand the importance of natural resources within their cities and towns. Additionally, the needs of Montana communities continue to change and expand in response to the challenges of wildland/urban interface, urban sprawl, and more complex community planning. The program provides technical assistance, planning, funding for local programs, volunteer coordination, and education to community leaders, volunteers, local governments, and the tree care industry. The program works closely with several major partners, including federal agencies, Montana RC&D areas, the university system, Montana's green industry, and private organizations. Staff also participate in the Montana League of Cities and Towns, local tree and park boards, and volunteer organizations.

Major categories of assistance are shown in Table 19.

Table 19	
Major Categories of Urban and Community Forestry Activities in FY 2004	
Communities with active programs	130
Montana "Tree City USAs" ¹	39
Communities receiving technical assistance	96
Technology transfer activities (workshops, presentations, conferences, training sessions)	188

1. "Tree City USA" is a national program through the National Arbor Day Foundation.

Highlights of the UCF Program for FY 2004 follow.

The program more than quadrupled the amount of grant funds awarded to communities. Nearly \$74,000 was disbursed to 65 communities through the UCF Program Development (\$56,000), Arbor Day (\$16,000), and Tree City USA (\$1,500) Grant Programs. In addition, nearly 100 communities celebrated Arbor Day in Montana; the official Arbor Day Celebration took place in Forsyth on April 29 with special guests Governor Judy Martz and State Legislator Monica Lindeen (D-Huntley). Holding an Arbor Day Celebration is one of the requirements for a community to receive the Tree City USA designation.

Three new Tree City USA communities were designated, for a statewide total of 39. Nearly 45 percent (403,147 residents) of Montana's population currently live in a Tree-City-USA-designated community, and 83 percent of the eligible population (those living in incorporated cities and towns) live in communities that have been so designated. The program offered the \$500 Tree City USA Reward Grant to each of the new communities.

The Montana Urban and Community Forestry Association and the UCF Program together prepared a Five-Year Strategic Plan for 2004-2009. In October, at the Annual Conference of the Montana League of Cities and Towns, the association presented the annual Community Forestry Excellence Awards to Eureka, Forsyth, Havre, and Judith Gap.

For its second year, the program sponsored the arborist training workshop at the Annual Conference of the Association of Montana Turf and Ornamental Professionals in Great Falls. Scholarships were awarded to seven communities to send tree board members and municipal employees. More than 65 arborists attended. In conjunction with NRCS, the program offered a large tree transplanting workshop free to arborists. This fall, the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) and the UCF Program will host an Intermediate Tree Climbing and Rigging Workshop in Bozeman for tree care professionals across the state. Additionally, the UCF coordinator serves as the Montana representative to ISA.

Fuels for Schools

Fuels for Schools is a federally-funded biomass utilization cost-share program which serves two primary purposes: providing a cost-effective method of heating public schools, and reducing hazardous forest fuels. Eligible schools can convert existing high-cost heating systems to highly efficient wood-chip-fired boilers and reduce fuel costs by over 50 percent. Schools planned for construction can also receive cost share for initial installation. Once the new systems are in place, schools must utilize biomass generated from forest fuel reduction for at least 50 percent of the fuel. The Service Forestry Bureau has partnered with USFS, the Bitter Root RC&D office, and other local RC&D offices to deliver this program.

Currently one system is up and running in the west. Darby, the demonstration project, went on line in November of 2003. Engineering assessments were completed at four additional schools in 2003, as well. During 2004, engineering assessments were completed at five more schools. Two schools, Victor and Philipsburg, received cost-share grants; construction has begun, and the systems are expected to be on-line for the winter of 2004-5. Montana has received a \$1.25 million grant for use in FY 2005. For additional information, visit the website at www.fuelsforschools.org.

Resource Conservation and Development

This program is a partnership between the Service Forestry Bureau and local RC&D offices. The RC&D office provides funding, and DNRC provides the part-time services of a service forester to assist in developing and implementing a forestry program for the RC&D. This partnership has been in effect for more than 30 years. In 2004, service foresters were active at the Bitter Root (Hamilton), Headwaters (Butte), and Northwest Regional (Libby) RC&D offices.

In 2004 RC&D foresters were instrumental in securing and implementing fuel hazard reduction grants, preparing community wildfire plans for numerous counties, developing watershed protection plans, and acting as technical advisors for street tree committees and the Fuels for Schools Program.

Conservation Reserve Program

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a federal program assisting farmers and ranchers in addressing soils- and water-related resource concerns. It encourages conversion of highly erodible or sensitive cropland to vegetative cover. USFS provides DNRC with small amounts of grant funding to implement such projects. DNRC works with partners to develop individual projects, grants dollars to partners to implement projects, and then provides project administration.

In 2004 approximately \$15,000 was available. Three projects were completed. One provided funding for an irrigation headgate to control water flow and address existing water quality impacts. In two other projects in eastern Montana, DNRC partnered with Pheasants Forever to convert 60 acres on three sites from gravel pits and unused farmland to upland game habitat and shelterbelts.

